CLAIMS

I claim:

1. An audio/video system, comprising:

a local area network having a data network, a control bus, and a plurality of nodes;

a plurality of audio/video appliances each having available audio/video presentations, said audio/video appliances respectively operatively connected to said plural nodes for transmitting information about the available audio/video presentations to said local area network;

at least one audio/video output unit for outputting audio/video signals;

a control unit having a control program and a memory which stores the information about the audio/video presentations transmitted by said audio/video appliances;

an operating unit connected to said control unit; and

a visual output unit operatively arranged for displaying the information about the available audio/video presentations independently of the audio/video appliances and dividing the information into classes.

2. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein each class includes at least one subclass and wherein said audio/visual output unit displays the classes, the subclasses for a selected class and names for ones of said audio/video presentations in a selected class and subclass.

3. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said operating unit comprises means for selecting a selected one of the available audio/video presentations independently of the appliances and means for automatically retrieving the selected one of the available audio/video presentations using said control unit.

4. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said at least one audio/video output unit further comprising a plurality of audio/video output units for outputting audio/video signals.

5. The audio/video system of claim 4, wherein said operating unit comprises means for selecting one of said plural audio/visual output units.

6. The audio/video system of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of operating units connected to said control unit.

7. The audio/video system of claim 6, wherein each of said plural operating units is assigned a priority.

8. The audio/video system of claim 7, wherein a selection made using one of said plural operating units having a relatively high priority is prevented from being modified by another operating unit having a lower priority.

9. The audio/video system of claim 3, wherein said control unit is operatively arranged for assigning a priority to each of said plural audio/video appliances.

10. The audio/video system of claim 9, wherein at least two of said plural audio/video appliances have the selected one of the available audio/video presentations and said control unit comprises means for connecting the one of said at least two of said plural audio/video appliances having the highest priority to said at least one audio/video output unit.

11. The audio/video system of claim 3, wherein said control unit comprises means for reducing a volume when the selected one of the available audio/video presentations is changed.

12. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said operating unit comprises a start playback function, a stop playback function and a change volume function.

13. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said local area network comprises an optical ring network.

14. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said audio/video system is in a motor vehicle.

15. The audio/video system of claim 14, wherein at least one of said plural audio/video appliances is operatively arranged for reading map data for a navigation system.

16. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said audio/video system comprises a home multimedia system.

17. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein one of said classes comprises radio and TV stations.

18. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein one of said classes comprises a type of audio/video presentations.

19. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein one of said classes comprises music titles.

20. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein one of said classes is for information which is not continuously available.

21. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein an audio/video presentation is assigned to a plurality of classifications.

22. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said local area network comprises an open system.

23. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein wherein said control unit comprises virtual interfaces for each of said plural audio/video appliances.

24. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said control program comprises a plurality of service modules.

25. The audio/video system of claim 24, wherein said plural service modules comprise:

a first service module for selecting a suitable audio/video appliance for playing back the selected audio/video presentation;

a second service module for selecting and managing said at least one output unit;

a third service module for connecting the network's node addresses stipulated by the selections of the first and second service modules; and

a fourth service module which requests the functions of said first, second, and third service modules.

26. The audio/video system of claim 1, wherein said control program comprises a registration module for registering newly connected audio/video appliances.

27. A method for operating a local multimedia system having a plurality of audio/video appliances, including the steps of:

(a) transmitting information about available audio/video presentations from the audio/video appliances to a control unit, the information including one or more classifications of the audio/video presentations;

(b) processing the information about the available audio/video presentations into classes using the classifications independently of the appliances;

(c) outputting the information about the available audio/video presentations which has been processed into classes independently of the appliances onto a visual output unit;

(d) selecting an audio/video appliance which is suitable for playing back a selected audio/video presentation;

(e) connecting the selected audio/video appliance to an output unit; and

(f) playing back the selected audio/video presentation via the output unit.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein said step (a) comprises transmitting a classification, a subclass and a name by the audio/video appliances as information about the available audio/video presentation.

29. The method of claim 27, wherein said step (e) comprises selecting a selected audio/video output unit from a plurality of available audio video output units using the operating unit and connecting the selected audio/video output unit to the audio/video appliance selected in said step (d) by the control unit.

30. The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of assigning a priority to each of the operating units, and modifying a selection made using a first operating unit with a first priority only if it is done using an operating unit with the same or higher priority.

31. The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of assigning priorities to the audio/video appliances and said step (d) comprises selecting, by the control unit, the audio/video appliance with the selected audio/video presentation and which has the highest priority.

32. The method of claim 27, further comprising the steps of changing the currently selected audio/visual presentation using the operating unit;

selecting, by the control unit, the audio/video appliance which is suitable for playing back the newly selected audio/video presentation;

reducing the volume of the audio output unit from an original;

connecting the newly selected audio/video appliance to the audio output unit;

outputting the newly selected audio/video presentation via the audio output unit; and

returning the volume back to the original level.

33. The method of claim 27, wherein said step (a) comprises transmitting the information in an optical local area network.

34. The method of claim 27, wherein the classifications include a classification for radio and TV stations, a classification for the type of audio and/or video presentation available, a classification for music titles, and a classification for information which is not continuously available.

35. The method of claim 34, wherein said step (a) comprises transmitting the information about an available audio/video presentation including more than one classification, and allocating the audio/video presentation to more than one class on the basis of the more than one classifications.

36. The method of claim 27, wherein the number of classes in said step (b) is expandable.

37. The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of connecting the audio/video appliances and the control unit by virtual interfaces before said step (a).

38. The method of claim 27, wherein said step (a) comprises transmitting the information to the control unit which includes a control program having a plurality of service modules.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein said step (d) comprises selecting a suitable audio/video appliance for playing back the selected audio/video presentation by a first service module of the control program.

40. The method of claim 39, wherein wherein said step (e) comprises selecting the output unit managing the output unit by a second service module.

41. The method of claim 40, further comprising the step of connecting the audio/video appliance selected by the first service module and the output unit selected by the second service module by a third service module.

42. The method of claim 41, further comprising the step of requesting services of the first, second, and third service modules by a fourth service module.

43. The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of automatically registering a newly introduced audio/video appliance newly introduced into the multimedia system in a registration module.